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ABSTRACT

Described is a systems analysis approach focusing on the use of objectives and feedback for teachers, administrators, and parents working with exceptional children. Terms such as "objective", "student performance", and "feedback" are explained as they relate to the systems approach. It is noted that parents, teachers, and administrators can use objectives and feedback to design programs for special students by engaging in conference activities which include discussion of the child's strengths, problems, and educational environment. Presented are two case studies, as well as sample worksheets, to illustrate application of the systems analysis approach. (SBH)

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HOW TEACHERS, PARENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS CAN USE OBJECTIVES AND FEEDBACK IN PROGRAMS FOR SPECIAL STUDENTS

Council for Exceptional Children

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Rationale

To help students with special needs, attain and maintain new skills and understandings, there must be mutual planning and evaluation of instructional programs by parents, teachers, administrators and, when possible, the students.

Several authors (Lerner, Davis, et al) have described the use of a systems analysis by teachers during instructional planning and evaluation. An extension of this approach would be to include parents and administrators in this process and focus on the specific use of objectives and feedback.

Such a focus is critical since the exceptional child often requires complex individualized and long term services which address multi-dimensional problems.

Common Problems

There are several common problems faced by parents and school personnel when attempting to function as a team and plan programs.

Most frequently no step by step decision making process is specified prior to meetings between parents and school personnel. Meetings are often crisis oriented and may lack the time for well thought out tests of problems, alternative solutions, and cost/benefits analyses.

A fair systematic decision making process should, by definition, be logical, rational and propose no one set of values. However, those involved in such a process, regardless

of role, have different value systems, perceptions, and are not always logical or rational. In addition, by virtue of a particular role, operating assumptions, objectives, priorities and approaches will differ greatly.

Furthermore, even when a fair, systematic decision making process is outlined and various participants can agree on a general plan, the repertoire of technical skills required to specify and evaluate programs may be incomplete or lacking entirely. The balance of consequences has historically been tipped against mutual planning and towards the accumulation and use of independent decision making power by school personnel. The lack of technical skills, especially by parents, contributes to the maintenance of this situation.

A Systems Approach

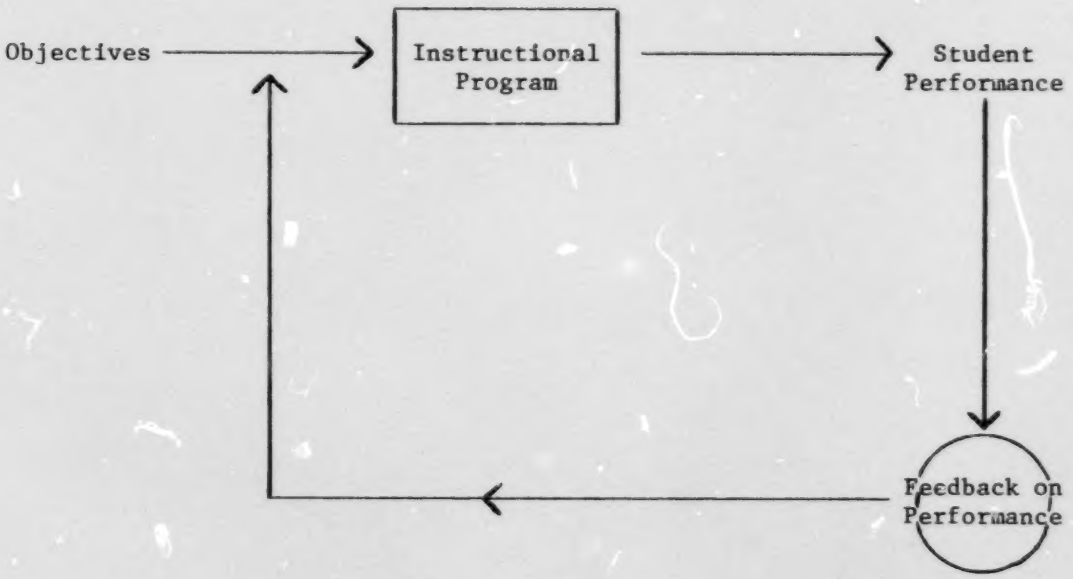
The goal for a team composed of parents and school personnel is to devise an effective program in a fair and systematic fashion. The goal is a plan which can be periodically evaluated and modified when necessary.

It is suggested that the educational environment be viewed as a system comprised of several parts. These parts include objectives, instructional programs, student performance and feedback on performance.

The term objective refers to a written statement describing observable and measurable student performance. It includes the conditions under which the student will perform and a minimal level of acceptable performance to be attained.

The instructional program involves all activities which facilitate the attainment of objectives by the student. These include: individual behaviors of the student, interactions between the student and his classmates and teacher, student use of classroom equipment and materials and possibly school related projects at home or in the community, facilitated by the parents.

Student performance is defined as the skill, awareness or understanding the student demonstrates in the attainment of an objective.



There is an assumption that decisions to maintain or modify the instructional program are or should be dependent on the increase in student performance as related to the attainment of objectives.

The term feedback is used to describe a continuous process of collecting and using student performance information in order to influence future performance.

If the performance information indicates growth by the attainment of objectives, then the instructional program is maintained. If progress is not demonstrated or if the desired level of performance is not attained within prescribed time limits, program modifications are indicated.

This process is useful in several ways. First, it provides a systematic way of adapting to changes in the educational environment. It assumes that there is a constant state of flux and prepares the way for continuous analyses and adaptation, if and when it's necessary.

Second, if the feedback is relevant and fair it aids in deciding who, what, when, where, how and why to alter the objectives and/or the instructional program.

Third, if there is a focus on the desired student behavior or performance, one can more easily focus on positive approximations towards objectives in relation to the ideas and performance of each participant in the educational planning team.

Fourth, participants are encouraged to use and examine the objectives. Too frequently lists of objectives without

criteria, are proposed, put in a drawer, and never really used in the decision making process. It is difficult to know when success is attained if success has not been defined. The inclusion of a criteria in the objective will facilitate such evaluation.

Fifth, specification of objectives and feedback on performance provides historical documentation of programming efforts. Long term analyses of such information can yield patterns and cues that would not be available otherwise.

Individualized Programs, Conferences and Worksheets

Parents, teachers and administrators can use objectives and feedback to design programs for special students by engaging in the series of activities during a conference. These activities would include:

- A brief preliminary discussion involving the purpose of the conference, general information relating to the child's strengths, problems and educational environment.
- A two part worksheet which requires the parent, teacher and administrator to address general preplanning questions and then to generate more specific ideas concerning objectives and feedback.
- A discussion in which participants compare their worksheets and generate a specific plan.

The worksheet seems to focus attention on the critical issues which should be discussed during a planning conference. The worksheet requires participants to answer each question by briefly jotting down key words in boxes. One is relieved

of the pressures of writing in complete sentences with correct grammar and spelling.

It encourages, especially for the parent, a more active role in the discussions and planning. By allowing for the naming of different decision makers for different objectives, the worksheet makes it clearer to the parents that they too have a chance to advance their ideas, objectives and goals for their child. In addition, the request to rank objectives or appropriate decision makers serves to encourage more flexible planning.

The following are questions that are included in Part I of the worksheet and should be addressed prior to a general discussion. In some groups it can serve as a basis for the discussion.

Objectives:

- What are the main problems or questions to be answered?
- Who should be the main decision maker for each problem? (decision makers can be ranked.)
- Why should each make the decision?

Instruction:

- What solutions or actions should be taken for each problem?
- How much time should be provided for each solution?

Focusing on these issues will serve to clarify issues and responsibilities. This is necessary prior to generating more specific plans. Discrepancies between the participants at

this stage should at least be clarified if not settled.

The next level of specificity in program planning focuses on the specification of objectives, criteria and feedback.

These components listed on Part II of the worksheet are dictated from the general problems and solutions generated on the first part of the worksheet and discussion.

Objectives:

- What are some objectives (rank these)?
- What is the criteria for each objective?

Feedback:

- How should performance information be collected and used (who, when, where)?
- What will the feedback forms look like?
- What decision will be made with the information?

Sample Worksheets and Case Studies

The following two case studies illustrate how these procedures can be applied. The first case involves a 12 year-old boy with Down's syndrome and the second involves a 20 year-old female who had polio as a child. In the example both worksheets were filled out by the parent.

Case 1: Chris L. is a 12 year-old male with Down's syndrome. He attends a school which has classes for trainable retarded youngsters. Chris is the oldest of three boys in the family. He is essentially non-verbal but thought to be easy going, polite and helpful by his teacher and family. The instructional program in his class has focused on self-care skills. The child's mother

wants a shift in emphasis at school and has asked the previous two teachers to provide for minimal academics and intensified language training. For various reasons the teachers have refused to move in this direction. The parent has involved the local parent-teacher organization in this situation. During the previous year the group invited an educator from a neighboring county to a chapter meeting. There was a demonstration which illustrated the educability of Down's syndrome children and several related teaching techniques. At the beginning of the year the mother initiates a conference with the new teacher and requests an increased emphasis in language skills and the inclusion of minimal academic subjects such as reading and arithmetic.

Case 2: Martha K. is a 20 year-old female who contracted polio at age 2. She uses a motorized wheelchair since her lower extremities are paralyzed. She has full use of her arms and hands and her breathing is unaffected. Martha is the youngest of five children, attends a regular high school and will graduate this term. She does average work in school subjects, and seems well motivated. Both parents and her teachers think that she is immature and dependent with poor social skills. A planning conference is being held prior to graduation. Martha talks about being independent, seeking employment and getting married. On the other hand, her parents and teacher express concern about her "lack of reality". The teacher, as required by law, has initiated this pre-graduation conference, and has requested that a counselor from the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation attend.

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

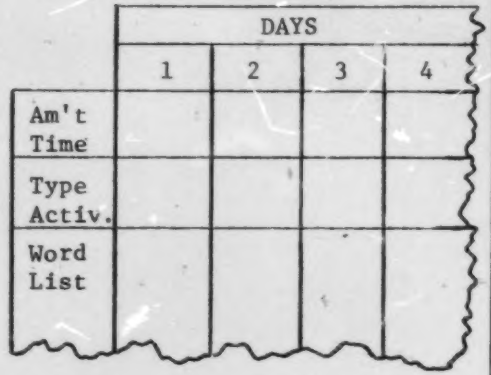
Part 1:

Main Problems or Questions to Answer	Who Should Be the Main Decision Maker?	Why?	What Action Should Be Taken For Each Problem?	Proposed Time Limits for Each Problem

Part II:

What Are Some Objectives? (Rank These)	What is the Criteria For Each Objective?	How Should Performance Information Be Collected? (Who? When? Where?)	What Will the Feedback Form Look Like? Graph?	What Decisions Will be Made With the Information?

Case I Chris 12

Main Problem or Question to be Answered	Who Decides (Rank)	Why	What Could Be Done	
Should language training be provided?	Mother	-I have had a long term request. -I have gained professional advice.	1. If teacher says - she doesn't know how; I can -ask for a special teacher, student teacher or tutor or -get model lessons from the speaker and give them to teacher. 2. If teacher says - there is no time: suggest, team teaching, records, filmstrips, call the principal, PTO, switch class to other teacher.	3. Get information on the number of words used at meal times or list the words or types of sentences currently being used.* *Advice from educator.
Possible Objectives	Criteria	Performance Information	Feedback Forms	Decision/Problem Solving
1) Have x amount time for pre language/ language training per day. 2) Increase number of words spoken in school at lunch time. 3) Increase number of words spoken at home at dinner time.	Min-30m. daily 15 m-2x day 10 m-3x day 5 m-6x day 1-2-3% - 10% depends on original performance 2-3% - 10%	Each week a card point by the teacher to the parent with a list of words studied.		Short term - use information to find most effective activities. Long term - the information concerning the quality and quanity of language improvement will be compared to the amount of time necessary for training in school and at home. (Additional training programs may be necessary).

Case II Martha

Main Problem or Questions to Answer	Who Decides (Rank)	Why	What could be done	Time Limits
Degree of Independence to plan and do. How much training in independent gross motor skills is necessary for independent living.	1. Student 2. Parent 3. Teacher	Wants to function independently-and she is over legal age. Legal responsibility of school to plan. Vocational Rehabilitation can continue service.	-Identify skills and possibilities at group meeting. -Specify positive and negative consequences of each possibility. -State possible criteria and time line for progress.	6 months to one year.

Possible Objectives	Criteria	Performance Information	Feeback Forms	Decision/Problem Solving
1) Home Economic Skills 2) Prevocational Skills -Interview -Applications, etc. 3) Vocational Skills 4) Financial Skills 5) Gross motor skills -using manual wheelchair instead of motorized wheelchair, driving a car, cooking and working skills 6) Social Skills -Talk to students in class -Talk to adults in stores, home	Shop and cook 3 meals a week for 2 months Practice for and apply for a job. Keep a job, 1-2 mos. Maintain a check book 1-2 months. List critical skills Do these independently after training Interact with a student do 1-3 tasks a week in a group situation Introduce self to a stranger Initiate conversation 1-2 a week.	Group agreement to track/contract weekly/monthly tasks at school and tasks at home. This program involves a long term investment in training by the student, teacher and parents.	Self Management Form: Times I talk to strangers___ ___ ___, Jobs I apply for ___ ___ ___ ___ ___, Skills necessary for getting a job___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___, Skills necessary for moving around at work ___ ___ ___ ___ ___, Skills necessary for living alone___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___,	Each 3 month period the group uses the feedback form to review the progress (re: number of skills attained) and to plan activities for the next 3 months.

A systems approach seems to structure and simplify a complex set of interactions. Although it can be perceived as an artificial organization it facilitates planning so that energy can be directed towards the more complicated issues.

A systems view which stresses the use of objectives and feedback and incorporates the use of a worksheet by teacher, parent and administrator has several advantages over the more traditionally verbal, non-systems oriented procedures.

First of all, the inherent structure of the systems approach saves much planning time. This approach encourages clearer goals, firmer schedules and a greater emphasis on the accountability of the various conference participants. The worksheet, especially part one, facilitates the raising and clarifying of issues that are often not addressed but are none the less problematic. This is especially true for the identification or ranking of the main decision maker(s) for each problem or issue. In addition, requiring written statements tends to generate less arbitrary and unrealistic objectives (and fewer anecdotal remarks) than a purely verbal discussion.

The systems approach to educational programming provides us with the technology for efficient and effective planning. However, there is a human aspect involved in the mutual planning of educational programs by teachers, parents, administrators,

and students, that must not be deemphasized. As we have stated, the differing roles of the participants, their values, perceptions, objectives and priorities affect the decision-making process. The atmosphere in which joint planning takes place is of prime importance. The group leader must foster feelings of respect and trust among the participants as they work towards their common goal.

The systems approach, in its emphasis on a fair systematic decision-making process is an excellent vehicle for these humanistic concerns.

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